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INFO RUCNSOM/SOMALIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFIUU/CJTJF HOA
RUZEFAA/CDR USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 001627

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR AF/E AND A/S CARSON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [SO](#)

SUBJECT: SOMALIA - Shabelle Details Intimidation, Problems

REF: NAIROBI 1133

Summary

¶1. (SBU) Shabelle Media Network's CEO and his Deputy on July 23 claimed their station was more actively targeted than others, but noted that all media in Somalia have experienced difficulties. Citing the deaths of two of their directors in the past two years (reftel) and the shrinking space for independent media outlets in Mogadishu, they appealed for assistance in moving Shabelle's operations out of Somalia. End Summary.

Shabelle Targeted

¶2. (SBU) Shabelle Media Network (SMN) CEO Abdimaalik Yusuf Mohamud and his deputy, Mohamed Amiin Adow, briefed us on July 23 about the ongoing threats faced by SMN and detailed how they believed Shabelle had been targeted particularly intensively. The two pointed to the murders of two directors - Mukhtar Hirabe on June 7 (reftel) and Bashir Nur Gedi in October 2007 - as evidence of specific targeting of SMN by al-Shabaab. Reftel noted that Hirabe's assassination may have resulted from his coverage of the rumored death of Hassan Dahir Aweys and his conversation with Post about Aweys. However, Adow told us that Hirabe had received a threat from al-Shabaab on June 2 after refusing to "donate" several drums of fuel for the "jihad." He was assassinated five days later.

¶3. (SBU) Adow also described the closure of Shabelle's Merka FM station after al-Shabaab demanded a list of radio programs. Rather than air extremist-directed programming, particularly re-broadcasts of programming from Shabaab's Andulus Radio, or have their equipment confiscated, the managers decided to tell the Shabaab authorities in Merka that the equipment had technical problems and needed to be taken to Mogadishu for repairs, after which the staff closed the station. In Mogadishu, the owner of the building in which SMN rents its office space had been threatened if he did not evict Radio Shabelle. Adow said masked men were stationed near the Shabelle headquarters daily, monitoring who entered and who left. Adow claimed that several SMN staffers have been holed up in the building for several weeks, fearing assassination if they left the location. Adow also stated that Shabaab was monitoring the SMN website. While the website has a U.S. Embassy logo from a program several years ago, they are reluctant to post any new Embassy material, such as Embassy press releases.

¶4. (SBU) More broadly, Yusuf and Amiin repeated the oft-heard statements that any station that refused to carry pro-Shabaab programs would have its personnel targeted. Owing to Somalia's

often-intertwined relationships among reporters and outlets, a number of the reporters injured or harassed in the recent past have been associated with SMN.

Relocate, or
Close

15. (SBU) Yusuf and Adow, who reside in the UK and Sweden respectively, told us that their fifty Mogadishu-based employees have told SMN management that they will tender their resignations within a week unless something is done to mitigate the obvious risks involved in their work. Yusuf and Adow appealed for assistance in relocating the operations to Nairobi. They had plans to build studios in Minnesota and London, as well. According to their USD 700,000 proposal, they would transmit programs to Mogadishu via satellite, where a skeleton staff would transfer the signal to FM transmitters in the capital. The two appeared resigned to the fact that the deteriorating situation would not allow their station to survive in Mogadishu.

Comment

16. (SBU) Independent media in Somalia are clearly operating in a climate of fear and intimidation, although SMN's circumstances appear bleaker than most. We cannot corroborate Yusuf's and Adow's account, but the assassination of Hirabe on June 7 serves as a chilling reminder of the hazards that Somali journalists face. Our

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requests to have U.S. officials conduct interviews on Somalia-based stations are almost uniformly turned down because of the intimidation detailed by Yusuf and Adow. Our offers to advocate on behalf of the threatened stations are also refused, often with specific requests not to associate the stations with the USG in any manner.

SLUTZ